AN

ENQUIRY

INTO THE

ORIGIN, DIVINE AUTHORITY, AND EXPEDIENCY

OF

CIVIL ESTABLISHMENTS

OF

RELIGION

IN GENERAL,

AND OF

CHRISTIANITY

IN PARTICULAR.

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AN

ENQUIRY, &c.

BY a civil eſtabliſhment of religion I underſtand an interpoſition of the chief magiſtrate, or governing power for the ſupport of certain articles of faith, and rites of worſhip. In different periods and nations this authority has been employed and carried to various degrees of extent; and there are very few ages, or countries, in which it has not been in ſome meaſure exerciſed. In the hiſtory of ancient and modern times we meet with numerous examples of the interference of civil government in matters of religion.

Very ſoon after the Jewiſh people were carried into captivity by Nebuchadnezar, king of Babylon, they were required to conform to the eſtabliſhed worſhip of the country. This idolatrous prince having cauſed a golden image, of very extraordinary ſtature, to be made, ſummoned all the officers of his government, both civil and military, to be preſent at the dedica-

tion of it. When agreeably to his direction they were aſſembled before the image, which he had ſet up, "an herald cried aloud, to you it is commanded, O people, nations, and languages, that at what time ye hear the ſound of the cornet, flute, harp, ſackbut, pſaltery and all kinds of muſic, ye fall down and worſhip the golden image, which Nebuchadnezar the king hath ſet up, and whoſo falleth not down and worſhippeth, ſhall the ſame hour be caſt into the midſt of a burning fiery furnace."*— In obedience to this dreadful proclamation, all his own ſubjects paid the required homage. But the Jewiſh captives, becauſe they refuſed to unite with them in this act of worſhip, were accuſed of diſobedience. Information was lodged againſt three of them in particular, who having been raiſed to offices of diſtinguiſhed truſt and honour, were the objects of a more marked attention. It was ſaid, "theſe men, O king, have not regarded thee; they ſerve not thy gods; nor worſhip the golden image, which thou haſt ſet up." Then Nebuchadnezar in his wrath commanded Shedrach, Meſhach, and Abed-nego, to be brought before him, and ordered the proclamation to be repeated in their preſence. But with a degree of courage and reſolution, which religion is fitted

* Daniel iii. 4,—6.

fitted to inſpire, they anſwered and ſaid to the king, O Nebuchadnezar, we are not careful to anſwer thee in this matter. With plainneſs and firmneſs they told him, they did not conſider themſelves as reſponſible to him in their religious concerns. This conduct excited the moſt violent indignation in the king, and he commanded, that they ſhould be caſt into the midſt of the burning fiery furnace. But by the miraculous interpoſition of Divine Providence they were preſerved from injury, though the men, who were employed in executing the commands of the king, were deſtroyed by the flames.

Here is a ſtriking example of the interference of the chief magiſtrate in the affairs of religion. He not only preſcribed a certain mode of worſhip, but endeavoured to enforce the obſervance of it by the moſt dreadful puniſhment.

If from Aſſyria we direct our attention to Greece, we ſhall find, that a particular ſyſtem of religious worſhip was maintained there alſo by the ſtate. The belief and adoration of a certain number of Deities were commanded, and no one could depart from the eſtabliſhed opinion and cuſtoms of the country with impunity. The principal ground, upon which ocrates was proſecuted, was, that inſtead of

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paying homage to the Gods, which the ſtate worſhiped, he introduced other new deities.* I mean not to examine, whether this charge was well-founded; the only uſe, which I would make of this tranſaction, is to ſhew, that the crime imputed to him was a departure from the religion of his country. This fact being admitted, it undeniably follows, that a religious faith and worſhip were preſcribed by the ſtate at Athens, that a deviation from them was made the ſubject of legal puniſhment, and that this diſtinguiſhed philoſopher was the victim of this policy.—The treatment, which the apoſtle Paul afterwards experienced in this celebrated city, alſo clearly proves, that the civil power was there employed for the maintenance of particular religious opinions. "Certain philoſophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoicks, after encountering him, carried him before their court, and one of the allegations brought againſt him was, that he ſeemed to be a ſetter forth of ſtrange gods; becauſe he preached unto them Jeſus, and the reſurrection."†——In another part of Greece alſo, at Philippi, the chief city of Macedonia, the national religion was guarded with the utmoſt care. When Paul and Silas were carried before the magiſtrates "for teaching cuſtoms which

* Zenophon's Mem. book 1, chap. 1.
†Acts xvii. 18.

which were not lawful, they rent off the clothes of the apoſtles, and commanded them to be beaten."*

The interpoſition of the civil power for the ſupport of particular doctrines and rites in religion was no leſs conſpicuous at Rome. Edicts were publiſhed by ten different emperors with a view of checking the progreſs of Chriſtianity. The ground of their oppoſition was, that it interfered with the general worſhip and rites of their gods. This clearly appears from ſome of their declarations. Pardon was promiſed to the Chriſtians, if they afforded proof of their repentance by ſupplicating their gods; and the principal charge alledged againſt them was, that the number of thoſe, who purchaſed victims, was very much diminiſhed. The followers of Jeſus, during the ſpace of nearly three centuries, were therefore puniſhed for departing from the eſtabliſhed faith and worſhip of the empire.——Other circumſtances might be brought forward, if neceſſary, to ſhew, that certain religious opinions and rites were maintained by the civil power throughout the whole Roman empire, and a deviation from them prohibited by the Roman law. But this fact is ſufficiently eſtabliſhed by what has been already advanced.

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*Acts xvi. 22.

We have now ſeen the origin and general prevalence of civil eſtabliſhments of religion in heathen nations. If we next examine what kind of treatment religion has met with from the Chriſtian governments of this world, it will appear, that, about three hundred years after the publication of the goſpel, its intereſt or what was conceived to be its intereſt, was zealouſly eſpouſed and ſupported by the Roman emperors.

In the year 312 Conſtantine publiſhed an edict in favour of Chriſtianity. This was ſoon followed by a toleration of religion in general, and of this inſtitution in particular. He gave eſpecial command, that all places of worſhip ſhould be freely and immediately reſtored to thoſe profeſſors of the goſpel, who had been deprived of them. He alſo exempted the Chriſtian clergy from civil and burdenſome offices, and preſented them with a ſum of money for their own uſe. Reſtitution was likewiſe made to ſome, who had been injured on account of their profeſſion of Chriſtianity. He went ſtill further. He not only granted a compleat toleration to the followers of Jeſus, but diſtinguiſhed them by ſeveral peculiar privileges. The ſuperintendence of the provinces was chiefly committed to them; and when any Gentiles were appointed governors

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they were prohibited to ſacrifice. Afterwards two laws were publiſhed at the ſame time, one forbidding the deteſtable rites of idolatry, and commanding, that none ſhould erect ſtatues of the gods, practiſe divination, or offer ſacrifices. The other was deſigned to encourage the enlargement of Chriſtian oratories and churches, and the rebuilding them in a more lofty, grand, and ſplendid manner.

Tho' Conſtantine in his oration againſt idolatry expreſſed his ſentiments with great mildneſs, yet he demoliſhed ſeveral heathen temples, and deprived others of their moſt valuable and reſpected ornaments. And after he had endeavoured to ſuppreſs every ſpecies of idolatry throughout the Roman empire, he employed warm and vigorous exertions to give firmneſs and ſtability to the chriſtian church. With this view he called the council at Nice for the purpoſe of ſettling differences in religion, and reſtoring peace and unity among chriſtians. After holding this council he condemned his paſt forbearance towards heretics, that is, towards thoſe chriſtians, who entertained different opinions from his own, or from the decrees of the council. In the edict, which he publiſhed againſt perſons of this deſcription, he ſays, "we have given orders, that all thoſe places, where you are wont to hold aſſemblies,

be taken away. Yea, our concern for this matter is ſuch, that we not only forbid you to aſſemble in any public places, but we forbid all aſſemblies of your fooliſh ſuperſtition in private houſes, and in all private places whatever. All of you therefore, who have any ſincere love of truth, come to the catholic church.— And that this remedy may have its full effect we ordain, that all your ſuperſtitious conventicles, I mean oratories of all heretics, if it be fit to call ſuch houſes oratories, be forthwith taken away, and without oppoſition delivered to the catholic church, and that the reſt of your places be adjudged to the public."*

From the various acts of the emperor Conſtantine, which have now been recited, it is manifeſt, that he endeavoured to eſtabliſh a particular explanation of the holy ſcriptures. He not only deſtroyed the temples of the heathens, but attempted to ſuppreſs all ſentiments concerning chriſtianity, different from thoſe which he had himſelf adopted and encouraged.

Since the eſtabliſhment of the chriſtian religion by the emperor Conſtantine, it has been connected with and ſupported by the ſtate in every country, where it has been generally embraced and profeſſed. Not only in tho

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*Euſebius, vita Conſtantini, Lib. iii. cap. 65.

parts of the world, of which the Roman empire conſiſted, but alſo in other nations the civil magiſtrate has diſtinguiſhed and countenanced ſome particular ſect or denomination of chriſtians.

We ſhall form a ſtill more clear and extenſive idea of the origin and progreſs of civil eſtabliſhments of religion, if we inquire alſo into the ſtate of them in the Eaſt. Here we ſee an Arab, named Mahomet, forming with wonderful addreſs a new ſyſtem of faith and worſhip, and employing the civil power for its ſupport. In the year 609 he began to preach at Mecca, and tho' ſoon after driven with his followers from his native town, yet in the year 622 he had the ſatisfaction of ſeeing his religion embraced with reverence at Medina.

From the time of his eſtabliſhment at this city Mahomet aſſumed the exerciſe of the regal and ſacerdotal offices; and this connection between religion and civil government was preſerved inviolate by the Caliphs, his ſucceſſors, and has been in ſome degree maintained by every prince of the Mahometan faith.

Throughout the Arabian empire the Magians, Jews, and Chriſtians lie under conſiderable reſtraints on account of their religious profeſſion. * About two hundred years after Ma-

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*Gibbons' Decline and Fall of the Roman empire, vol. v. p. 389.

homet, perſons of the laſt of theſe denominations were ſeparated from their fellow ſubjects by a turban or girdle of a leſs honourable colour; inſtead of horſes or mules, they were condemned to ride upon aſſes, in the attitude of women. Their public and private buildings were of a ſmaller conſtruction; in the ſtreets or the baths it was their duty to give way or bow down before the meaneſt of the people; and their teſtimony was rejected, if it tended to the prejudice of a true believer. The pomp of proceſſions, the ſound of bells or pſalmody were interdicted in their worſhip; a decent reverence for the national faith was impoſed on their ſermons and converſations; and the ſacrilegious attempt to enter a moſch, or ſeduce a Muſulman was puniſhed as a crime of the higheſt magnitude. In times, however, of tranquility the Chriſtians have never been compelled to renounce the goſpel and embrace the koran. But the puniſhment of death is inflicted upon the apoſtates, who have profeſſed, but afterwards deſerted the law of Mahomet.

During the revolution of eleven centuries the Mahometan religion has been ſupported and defended by the civil power. Tho' freedom of conſcience and religious worſhip be admitted to thoſe who refuſe conformity to it, yet

yet all infidels are obliged to ſubmit to the payment of a moderate tribute.

The view, which has now been taken, of the ſtate of religion in general, and of Chriſtianity in particular, evidently ſhews the great antiquity and almoſt univerſal prevalence of civil eſtabliſhments of certain articles of faith, and rites of worſhip in different ages and parts of the world. Can it then be regarded as a matter of ſurprize, that ſo warm a partiality and zeal for inſtitutions of this kind ſhould appear in our own time and country? May it not be reaſonably expected, that ſtrong prejudices ſhould be entertained in favour of what has been held in ſo long and general veneration? And ſhould not this conſideration induce thoſe, who diſapprove of civil eſtabliſhments of religion, to treat ſuch, as are advocates for them, with great candour and moderation. If they are in an error, it is a very ancient and almoſt univerſal one; and it becomes thoſe, who have formed juſter notions, to point out their miſtake in the ſpirit of chriſtian meekneſs and ſimplicity.

However, let it be obſerved on the other hand, that, becauſe an opinion or practice is ancient and general, it ought not for this reaſon alone to be adopted and maintained. I hope to prove, that tho' civil eſtabliſhments of religion

religion have been common in almoſt every age and country, yet they are not ſupported by any divine authority. The obſervations, which I ſhall offer for this purpoſe, relate to thoſe exertions of the civil power, which have been made for the encouragement and defence of Chriſtianity, and muſt conſequently be more eſpecially intereſting to us as the friends of this excellent inſtitution.

I have not been able to diſcover a ſingle paſſage in the New Teſtament, which could ſuggeſt or encourage the idea of a national eſtabliſhment of religion. If this ſacred book contains any expreſſions, which give to the civil magiſtrate authority to interfere in matters of faith, I confeſs my ignorance of them. On the contrary, I think, that from a careful and impartial examination it will be found, that Jeſus Chriſt intended, that his religion ſhould not, like thoſe, which generally prevailed at the time of its publication, depend for its ſupport upon any human power; that he meant, it ſhould reſt upon a more ſure and honourable baſis, upon its own native excellence, and the protection of heaven. I hope I ſhall be able to produce ſeveral declarations made by our Lord and his apoſtles, which expreſſly forbid the ſtate or civil magiſtrate to interfere in matters of faith and opinion. Jeſus Chri

Chriſt has repreſented ſuch a thing as totally inconſiſtent with the reſpect due to himſelf. He ſays, "one is your maſter, even Chriſt, and all ye are brethren,—neither be ye called maſters, for one is your maſter, even Chriſt." Do not theſe words plainly ſhew, that our Lord conſidered himſelf as poſſeſſed of ſupreme and ſole authority in his church, and his followers as having an equal right to judge and interpret his words for themſelves, being all brethren, and accountable to him alone as their common maſter. The propriety of this interpretation is confirmed by the anſwer, which our Saviour made to the queſtion, put to him by the chief prieſts and ſcribes concerning the lawfulneſs of paying tribute to the Roman emperor. He replied, "render unto Cæſar the things, which are Cæſar's, and unto God the things, which are God's." He here plainly makes a diſtinction betwixt the affairs of civil government, and the buſineſs of religion; and it is the duty of his followers to attend to this diſtinction, nor blend together the concerns of the ſtate, and the doctrines and inſtitutions of the goſpel.

The object, which the civil magiſtrate ſhould conſtantly keep in view is the maintenance of peace and good order in ſociety; and he invades the province of Jeſus Chriſt, if he aſſumes

aſſumes authority to enforce a ſubſcription to his own interpretation of the word of God. When enquiry was made by Pilate, the Roman governor, whether our Lord was king of the Jews, he did not deny, that he had a kingdom, which he contemplated, and which it was his object to eſtabliſh. But it was one very different from that, to which he had been ſuſpected of making pretenſions. It was a kingdom not of this world: For if this had been the nature of it, he added, "my ſervants would have fought for me, nor ſuffered me to fall into the hands of the Jews."

The kingdom, to which Jeſus Chriſt here alludes, was manifeſtly that kingdom of righteouſneſs, which he came to eſtabliſh in the hearts and conſciences of mankind. The doctrines and precepts of his religion are the laws of his government, and the ſanctions, by which the obſervance of them is enforced, are thoſe rewards and puniſhments, which he has taught his ſubjects to expect in a future ſtate.

If any individual perſon, if any body of men ſhall aſſume to themſelves the power of preſcribing articles of faith, and of decreeing rites and ceremonies, they are guilty of invading the kingdom of Jeſus Chriſt. They are evidently chargeable with this ſin, unleſs they can ſhew themſelves to be inſpired, and can work mira-

miracles in order to manifeſt, that they have received a ſpecial commiſſion to decide in matters of faith, and that in this ſpecial commiſſion the general prohibition of Jeſus Chriſt is ſuſpended.

The interpoſition of the ſtate, of the civil magiſtrate, and of every kind of earthly power is alſo forbidden by the apoſtle Paul, as an infringement of the authority of Jeſus Chriſt. He ſays, " who art thou, that judgeſt another man's ſervant? To his own maſter he ſtandeth or falleth." A proper attention to the connection of theſe words will ſerve to juſtify the conſtruction, which I have now put upon them. In a following verſe he adds, " why doſt thou judge thy brother, or why doſt thou ſet at nought thy brother, for we all ſhall ſtand before the judgment ſeat of Chriſt." He plainly aſſerts, that we are accountable at the tribunal of Jeſus Chriſt alone for our religious principles and opinions. The ſame doctrine is alſo contained in this apoſtolic declaration: " For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jeſus Chriſt." But does not every man, who makes his own interpretation neceſſary, or who decrees rites and ceremonies, which Jeſus Chriſt has not ordained, does he not build upon his own foundation. He ſets himſelf in oppoſition to his maſter. At

leaſt he is wanting in that allegiance, which he owes to him as a faithful ſubject of his kingdom.

The paſſages, which have now been recited, I think evidently diſcountenance all civil eſtabliſhments of chriſtianity. Nor am I ſingular in this opinion. One of the declarations of our lord, which I have quoted, has been interpreted in the ſame way by a clergyman, who once ranked high in the church of England.

Biſhop Hoadley obſerves, that "Jeſus Chriſt is the ſole lawgiver to his ſubjects, and himſelf the ſole judge of their behaviour in the affairs of conſcience and eternal ſalvation; and in this ſenſe therefore his kingdom is not of this world; he hath in theſe points left behind him no viſible human authority, no vicegerents, who can be ſaid to ſupply his place, no interpreters, upon whom his ſubjects are abſolutely to depend, no judges over the conſciences and religion of his people. For if this were ſo, that any ſuch vicegerent authority, either for making new laws, or interpreting old ones or judging his ſubjects in religious matters were lodged in any men upon earth, the conſequence would be, that what retains the name of the church of Chriſt, would not be the kingdom of Chriſt, but the kingdom of thoſe men, veſted with ſuch authority. For wh
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hath ſuch an authority of making laws, is ſo far a king, and whoever can add new laws to thoſe of Chriſt equally obligatory, is as truly a king, as Chriſt himſelf is; nay who hath an abſolute authority to interpret any written or ſpoken law, it is he, who is truly the law-giver to all intents and purpoſes, and not the perſon, who hath firſt wrote or ſpoken them."

"Nor is this matter at all made better by declaring themſelves to be vicegerents or law-makers, or judges under Chriſt, in order to carry on the ends of his kingdom. For it comes to this at laſt, (ſince it doth not ſeem fit to Chriſt himſelf to interpoſe ſo as to prevent or remedy all their miſtakes or contradictions) that if they have this power of interpreting or adding laws, and judging men in ſuch a ſenſe, that Chriſtians ſhall be indiſpenſibly obliged to obey theſe laws and to ſubmit to this deciſion, if they have this power lodged with them, then the kingdom, in which they rule is not the kingdom of Chriſt, but of themſelves; he doth not rule in it, but they; and whether they happen to agree with him, or differ from him, as long as they are the law-givers and judges, without any interpoſition from Chriſt either to guide or correct their deciſions, they are kings of his kingdom and not Jeſus Chriſt."

The principle, upon which the biſhop of Wincheſter here reaſons with ſo much force, is evidently ſubverſive of all civil eſtabliſhments of Chriſtianity, and conſequently of that in particular, which prevails in our own country.

The Rev. Mr. Paley in his moral and political philoſophy obſerves, "a religious eſtabliſhment is no part of chriſtianity; it is only the means of inculcating it. It cannot be proved, that any form of church government was laid down in ſcripture with a view of fixing a conſtitution for ſucceeding ages. Certainly no command for this purpoſe was delivered by Chriſt himſelf; and if it be ſhewn, that the apoſtles ordained biſhops and preſbyters, deacons and deaconeſſes were appointed by them with functions very diſſimilar to any, which obtain in the church at preſent."

This may be regarded as a very conſiderable conceſſion to thoſe, who think, that civil eſtabliſhments of religion are diſcountenanced, if not abſolutely forbidden by Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles. However as there may be ſome, who will not admit the arguments againſt ſuch inſtitutions, which have been drawn from the paſſages of ſcripture I have examined, we will ſuppoſe a total ſilence in theſe ſacred writings upon the ſubject under diſcuſſion; and we will en-

enquire, whether there be any thing in their principles and tendency, which will recommend them to our approbation.

The archdeacon of Carliſle remarks, "the authority of church government is founded on its utility, and whenever upon this principle we deliberate concerning the form, propriety, or comparative excellence of different eſtabliſhments, the ſingle view, under which we ought to conſider any one of them is that of a ſcheme of inſtruction; the ſingle end we ought to propoſe by them is the preſervation and communication of religious knowledge. Every other idea and end have ſerved to debaſe the inſtitution, and introduce into it numerous corruptions and abuſes."

Tho' civil eſtabliſhments of chriſtianity appear to me to be repugnant to the declarations and authority of its founder; yet, as it has been already obſerved, we will, for the ſake of argument, ſuppoſe, that this point is not fully proved; that there is nothing in holy ſcripture, which can lead to a certain determination of it. Taking all this for granted, I think, theſe inſtitutions cannot be defended even on the ground of expediency. I hope to ſhew, that they are deſtructive of the right of private judgment, and religious liberty; that they have a natural tendency to injuſtice and oppreſſion;

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that they are favourable to worldly views, but unfriendly to thoſe of truth, piety, and virtue; and that they neither conſpire with the juſt rights, nor conduce to the beſt intereſts of mankind.

1ſt. Civil eſtabliſhments of religion in general, and of chriſtianity in particular, are deſtructive of the right of private judgment and religious liberty. They evidently interfere with the exerciſe of the one, and the enjoyment of the other in proportion to the number of articles of faith, which are contained in the preſcribed creed. When the interpretation of ſcripture ſet up by the ſtate or civil magiſtrate extends to a great variety of particulars, the probability of diſſent will be increaſed exactly in the ſame meaſure. And though the number of doctrines and ceremonies, which are enjoined, ſhould be ſmall, it is ſtill impoſſible to conceive, that they ſhould be univerſally received. Should nothing more be required, than a ſimple ſubſcription to the canonical books of holy writ, yet even this will lay an unjuſtifiable reſtraint on the freedom of the mind; or tend to hypocriſy, the worſt character in which religion can appear. The books of ſcripture, which are admitted into the canon, poſſeſſing different degrees of authenticity and credit, ſome will receive, and others

others will perhaps in part reject. If therefore the power of the ſtate requires an indiſcriminate ſubſcription to the whole, it requires belief, where belief is not rendered, and impoſes ſhackles on the freedom of the human mind.

But I apprehend, that there are very few, if any civil eſtabliſhments of chriſtianity, which do not require more, much more than this. They generally, if not univerſally aſſume a power of extracting from the ſcriptures certain doctrines, if not of decreeing certain rites and ceremonies, and inſiſt upon a ſubſcription to one and an obſervance of the other, as terms of admiſſion into the church. Now does not ſuch a requiſition plainly interfere with the exerciſe of that ſacred and unalienable right, the right of thinking and judging for ourſelves in matters of faith and eternal ſalvation.

This point will be ſtill more clearly illuſtrated by examining the actual ſtate of things in our own country. It is a well-known fact, that in thoſe ſocieties of Chriſtians, which acknowledge no other authority than that of Jeſus Chriſt, an uniformity of ſentiments concerning the doctrines of their religion was never found to prevail. Can it then be expected, that the whole nation ſhould be agreed in their opi-

opinion reſpecting the truth of thoſe articles of faith, an aſſent to which is rendered neceſſary by civil government for chriſtian communion. Without taking the laity into the account can it be reaſonably ſuppoſed, that the clergy of the church of England unanimouſly approve of every thing that is contained in its liturgy and articles. Such a thing is not only highly improbable, but contrary to fact. Many individuals have expreſſed their diſſatisfaction in ſeveral points with the religious eſtabliſhment of this kingdom, and have either withdrawn themſelves from it, or preſerved an external appearance of union with it, while their minds are alienated from it.

Nor has this been the conduct of ſingle and detached members alone. Some years ago a very reſpectable proportion of the clergy of this nation united in petitioning the legiſlature for relief from ſubſcription to the articles of the church; and at ſeveral different periods of time aſſociations have been formed for obtaining a reviſal and reform of the liturgy. Whoever will attend to the hiſtory of religion in this country for the laſt century, muſt be ſenſible, that the civil eſtabliſhment of chriſtianity in England, has not been and is not approved of by many of its moſt reſpectable members, and conſequently that it is injurious

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to the right of private judgment and religious liberty.

Perhaps it will be replied, that thoſe, who cannot approve ſhould quit the ſervice. But ſtill this is admitting the concluſion in all its force, and is reducing perhaps the wiſeſt and beſt of our fellow-chriſtians to a very hard alternative, either to comply againſt the dictates of their judgment and conſcience, or to ſacrifice their talents, learning, inclinations, and uſefulneſs, with all their temporal comforts, to the honeſt convictions of their own minds. It is adding inſult to injury.

But ſuppoſing, that they ſhould have ſo high a value for the ſacred rights of conſcience and private judgment as to diſſolve their connection with that church, which does not ſcruple to trample upon them and treat them with contempt, they will not be able to obtain compleat redreſs of their grievances by purſuing ſuch a ſtep. The evil by no means ends here. For they will be compelled to contribute to the maintenance of that ſyſtem of faith, of which they have ſo ſtrongly expreſſed their diſapprobation, and paſſively operate to its continuance.

2. I therefore proceed to obſerve, that civil eſtabliſhments of religion cannot be ſupported without great injuſtice. I will not appeal to

the rudeſt periods, in which conſcience has been ſubjected to every penalty that man can inflict, but contemplate only the injuſtice and oppreſſion of this milder day and this milder country. Can it be thought fair and equitable, that a man ſhall be obliged to contribute both paſſively and actively to the propagation and maintenance of opinions, which are directly contrary to the convictions of his own mind. If ſuch a thing was left to his own option, the objection againſt the inſtitutions under conſideration would be greatly diminiſhed, tho' not entirely removed. But I believe, that there is not exiſting at this time in any part of the world, a ſingle example of a connection between religion and civil government which exempts the Diſſenter from contributing in a variety of ways to the ſupport of the eſtabliſhed worſhip.

A clearer idea will be formed of the magnitude of this evil by attending to the nature and extent of it in our own country. I apprehend, that no more than a ſixth part of the inhabitants of England regularly attend the ſervice of the eſtabliſhed church. But ſevere reſtrictions are impoſed on all in whatever may be deemed an oppoſition to its diſtinguiſhing tenets; and all are compelled to contribute in an equal degree to its ſupport. So that a large ma-

majority of the nation are obliged to conform in ſome degree, and equally to contribute to the pecuniary maintenance of the religion of a very ſmall number of that civil community, of which they form the moſt conſiderable part. Now does there not appear at the firſt ſight a very high degree of injuſtice in ſuch a proceeding. Indeed thoſe, who approve of a civil eſtabliſhment of religion, but neglect its worſhip, have not much ground of complaint. But Diſſenters certainly ſuffer very unmerited hardſhips. Beſides what they voluntarily give to the ſupport of their own religious opinions and worſhip, a conſiderable ſum is extorted from them for the maintenance of thoſe, which appear to them contrary to reaſon and the word of God.

Nor are they the ſole perſons, who are injured by church eſtabliſhments. It is unjuſt alſo, that Deiſts and Infidels ſhould bear their part in the expence of ſupporting them. The demands, which are made of them for this purpoſe cannot be defended upon the principle of equity. In a word, I cannot help regarding every exaction of the ſtate for the maintenance of particular articles of faith and modes of worſhip, which are not univerſally received and approved, as a ſpecies of robbery; and I think, there is no doubt, but if ſuch an act

was committed by a weak and unprotected individual, it would meet with that degree of puniſhment, of which it is certainly deſerving.

Perhaps it will be alledged in juſtification of civil eſtabliſhments of religion, that tho' the complaint under conſideration be well founded, it is proper, that ſmaller evils ſhould be ſubmitted to with a view of obtaining and ſecuring a greater good. It may be ſaid, for inſtance, that the adminiſtration of juſtice, and the defence of property againſt a common enemy cannot be maintained without conſiderable expence, and yet that this inconvenience is born with cheerfulneſs by thoſe on whom the tax ought not to fall, as not contributing to the evil, becauſe a great benefit reſults from it. To ſhew the fallacy of this reaſoning, let it be obſerved, that one point is taken for granted, which has not yet been, and which perhaps never can be proved. It is ſuppoſed, but cannot be admitted, that the intereſts of truth and virtue cannot be maintained without an interpoſition of the civil power. Such a ſuppoſition is both groundleſs and diſhonourable to the Chriſtian religion. The goſpel is ſtiled by the apoſtle the power of God unto ſalvation. But the doctrine here inculcated abſolutely contradicts ſuch a truth. It neceſſarily

ſuppoſes,

ſuppoſes, that the ſcheme of chriſtianity was left imperfect by its founder, and could not produce its full effect without the aſſiſtance of human power. It evidently implies, that the precepts, examples, and motives of this excellent inſtitution are inſufficient by their own influence alone to render mankind wiſe, virtuous, and happy. We may therefore conclude, that this plea in favour of religious eſtabliſhments, which detracts ſo much from the efficacy and honour of the goſpel, is falſe and groundleſs.

3. The inſtitutions, the utility of which we are examining, are ſo far from being neceſſary to promote the cauſe of truth and virtue, that they will be found from a more cloſe attention to them greatly to obſtruct the progreſs of both in the world. The authority of the ſtate or civil magiſtrate has in few if in any inſtances been innocently exerted: It has either connived at, or patronized the moſt abſurd doctrines, or wicked and abominable practices. No kind of ſuperſtition or falſe worſhip has ever prevailed in any age or country, to which it has not given countenance. We have ſeen the power of the ſtate exerted with vigour for the maintenance of the moſt ſtupid idolatry at Babylon, at Athens, and at Rome. Such examples of the effects of civil eſtabliſhments of religion do

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not tend to give any favourable idea of their influence. It is no anſwer, that like all other things they are liable to abuſe. Abuſe is the certain and unavoidable conſequence of the unnatural union. The hiſtory of chriſtianity undeniably proves, that the intermixture of civil policy with the religion of God, has an uniform tendency to obſtruct the progreſs of truth and virtue. It is an unqueſtionable fact, that the goſpel made more rapid advances, before the power of the ſtate was employed for its ſupport than it has done ever ſince. The earlieſt Chriſtian writers, who were the moſt competent judges of this matter, have aſcribed its ſpread, its amazing ſpread to the influence of its plain and ſalutary truths, and to the bleſſing of heaven; and not to any human authority or encouragement whatever. *Theodoret, ſpeaking of the firſt preachers of the goſpel, obſerves, "how great the power of theſe illiterate men has been may appear to thoſe, who will compare the Greek and Roman law-givers with our fiſhermen and publicans. They will find, that theſe law-givers could not perſuade even their neighbours to live according to their laws; but theſe Galilean law-givers have perſuaded not only Greeks and Romans, but the tribes of the Barbarians alſo, to embrace the doc-

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*Who flouriſhed about the year 423.

trines of the goſpel---Our fiſhermen and publicans and tent-makers have perſuaded all men to embrace the laws of the goſpel, not only the Romans, and others ſubject to their empire, but Scythians, and Sarmatians, and Indians, and Ethiopians, and Perſians, and Britons, and Germans. Indeed they have brought all nations, and all ſorts of men to receive the laws of a crucified man; AND THAT NOT BY ARMS OR NUMEROUS LEGIONS OF SOLDIERS, NOR BY PERSIAN VIOLENCE; BUT BY REASONING, AND ARGUMENT, SHEWING THE USEFULNESS OF THESE LAWS."

So powerful was the influence of the chriſtian religion, before it became eſtabliſhed. But as ſoon as councils and emperors began to employ their authority for its ſupport it was corrupted and declined. Dr. Lardner, whoſe acquaintance with the early ſtate of Chriſtianity was very extenſive and accurate, has remarked; "In about three hundred years after the aſcenſion of Jeſus Chriſt, without the aids of ſecular power or eccleſiaſtical authority, the chriſtian religion ſpread over a large part of Aſia, Europe, and Africa; and at the acceſſion of Conſtantine, and the convening the council of Nice, it was almoſt every where, throughout thoſe countries, in a flouriſhing condition. In the ſpace of another three hundred

dred years, or a little more, the purity of the chriſtian religion was corrupted in a large part of this extent, its glory defaced, and its light almoſt extinguiſhed. What can this be ſo much owing to, as to the determinations and tranſactions of the council of Nice, and the meaſures then ſet on foot, and followed in ſucceeding times,"

I confeſs, that I am unable to account for this great decline of chriſtianity in any other way than by aſcribing it (as Dr. Lardner has done) to the interpoſition of human authority. This led to the introduction of many abſurd notions, and ſuperſtitious ceremonies, to the intermixture of human with divine wiſdom. And the corruptions flowing from this ſource have been regarded as the chief cauſe of the ruin of the chriſtian intereſt in the Eaſt. They have more than any other circumſtance prepared the way for the propagation and eſtabliſhment of the Mahometan faith in that part of the world.

To give a ſtill more clear and ſatisfactory demonſtration, that civil eſtabliſhments of religion have a tendency to obſtruct the progreſs of truth and virtue, it may be proper to explain in what particular manner they operate to produce this effect.

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The ſpirit of the world, and the ſpirit of religion are in their nature directly oppoſite. This is the view, which is given of them throughout the New teſtament. Jeſus Chriſt told his diſcipies, that he had choſen them out of the world; and becauſe they were not of the world, therefore the world hated them. And whatever attempts have been ſince made to reconcile together things, which are ſo totally at variance, abundantly ſhew the great importance of preſerving them entirely diſtinct and unmixed. For the truth of this obſervation I appeal to the experience of individuals and of nations. But I wiſh more eſpecially to point out the corrupt and pernicious conſequences, which have ariſen from the interference of civil government in the concerns of religion.

If we examine the various forms of civil government, which are eſtabliſhed in different parts of the earth, we may diſcover in them numerous marks of imperfection. Having no higher origin than human wiſdom, their laws and regulations in many inſtances cannot be reconciled with the ſober maxims of reaſon and virtue. Can it then be expected, that the union of religion with civil policy ſhould have any other effect than to debaſe its purity, by ſubmitting it to the convenience, the paſſions,

and even the vices of the very worſt of men, and at length to render it ſubſervient to thoſe intereſts, which it abhors.

Truth and purity are not the objects, upon the attainment of which the mind of the politician is fixed. He has other ends in view; and whatever promotes theſe ends he readily embraces and firmly maintains. The influence of religion itſelf is only borrowed as an aid to the execution of the moſt unworthy purpoſes.

But admitting, that the civil governor is in earneſt in religion, yet from his elevated rank and mode of education he muſt be ill-qualified for forming juſt notions of its principles. He is expoſed to error and impoſture, and his religion will moſt probably be that of ſuperſtition or fanaticiſm,---the religion of all ill-tutored minds, and that, which alone can accommodate itſelf to worldly ones. Thus he becomes himſelf the tool of ſhrewder politicians, and of crafty prieſts; and his very zeal is fatal to the truth and purity of ſuch a religion, as that of the New teſtament.

When an alliance is once formed and eſtabliſhed between the intereſts of the ſtate and what alone the civil magiſtrate is pleaſed to diſtinguiſh by the name of religion, he rudely ſhuts the door to free enquiry, and compels all

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to enter the temple, which he has conſecrated, and to worſhip the idol, which he has erected. He determines for all poſterity the meaſure of truth, and arrogantly preſumes to forbid all further examination.

Nor is it neceſſary for ſupporting the errors and corruptions of a religious eſtabliſhment, that the ſame kind of perſecution ſhould be employed, which ſavage Rome practiſed. Excluſive favour is a more refined policy, acts with leſs odium, occaſions leſs reſiſtance, and is more fatally ſucceſsful. The multitude, if not too harſhly commanded, are ſure to paſs into the religion of the ſtate, while the ſtimulus of honours and rewards, which are in no other way to be obtained, makes many apoſtates from the cauſe of truth, and hourly thins the ranks of her virtuous adherents. Nor is this proneneſs to the religion of the ſtate, whatever this religion be, to be counteracted but by the follies and miſchiefs, which ſpring out of unprincipled policy, however artfully conducted, and by the efforts of great and extraordinary characters, whom divine providence is pleaſed in mercy to oppoſe to the miſtaken or wicked policies of this world. Without the operation of theſe correctives, the very idea of truth, conſidered as the truth of nature and of God, paſſes into general oblivion; its friends

are diſcountenanced, oppreſſed and perſecuted; and though better ſentiments of religion may not be wholly extinguiſhed, yet the bulk of the nation is conſigned to error, and the means of recovery are diminiſhed by the ignorance, ſtupor, and obſtinacy, which are the wretched progeny of a ſtate-religion.

Such is the character, ſuch the tendency of every civil eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity from the time of Conſtantine, when the unnatural union firſt commenced, to the preſent day. Nor ſhall we find a ſingle inſtitution of this kind in Europe, to which the enlightened and conſcientious diſciple of the New teſtament can ſubmit himſelf without a violation of good principle and conviction.

The fatal influence of eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhments upon the minds and character of the clergy, by whoſe exertions the intereſts of truth and virtue are chiefly to be promoted, is more eſpecially deſerving of attention.

When the ſtate or chief magiſtrate has once aſſumed a power of impoſing articles of faith, and of decreeing rites and ceremonies, an implicit ſubmiſſion to ſuch authority becomes indiſpenſibly neceſſary for admiſſion or preferment in the church. But a compliance with ſuch a requiſition cannot always be expected without a loſs of integrity. When the pre-

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ſcribed creed conſiſts of a great number of articles, it is highly probable, that ſome of them will be contrary to the inward convictions of the perſon, who is a candidate for holy orders. In ſuch a caſe he cannot enter into the ſervice of the church without incurring the guilt of hypocriſy. And when he has by prevarication and deceit gained admiſſion, what reaſonable proſpect can he have of uſefulneſs and ſucceſs. Can he expect, that thoſe, who are placed under his care, ſhould reſpect his character, or profit by his inſtructions. Is it likely that he ſhould ſpeak the truth without regarding conſequences, when he has been guilty of ſo ſolemn and deliberate a violation of it. When the word is preached by men of this character is there any reaſon to hope, that the God of truth will bleſs their labours, and render them ſubſervient to the advancement of true religion?

But I am not ſo deſtitute of candour and charity as to believe, that all, who enter into the ſervice of the church, go againſt the dictates of their own judgment and conſcience. I hope, there are many advocates for eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhments, who ſubſcribe the articles propoſed to them at their admiſſion, and engage in the duties of their profeſſion, with the entire approbation of their own minds. But

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when we conſider the early age, at which the work of the miniſtry is undertaken, it can ſcarcely be with reaſon ſuppoſed, that clear and ſettled notions are formed concerning all thoſe doctrines, to which a full and expreſs aſſent is required. We may therefore conclude, that ſome ſubſcribe the articles of the church without, though not againſt, conviction. Now, if upon further and more deliberate examination any thing ſhould be diſcovered in the eſtabliſhed ſervice, which appears to be contrary to the dictates of reaſon and the word of God, it will create a conſiderable embarraſſment in the mind of the perſon, by whom it is perceived. If he is already ſettled agreeably to his inclination, he will be ſtrongly tempted to continue in his preſent ſituation and to make ſhipwreck of faith and a good conſcience. But ſhould he not poſſeſs ſufficient reſolution and ſelf-denial to withſtand the allurements, by which he is thus tried, the intereſts of truth and virtue will be reſigned, and ſo far as they depend upon his exertions, their progreſs will be entirely obſtructed.

The inſtitutions, which we are examining, tend in various other ways to hinder the propagation and ſucceſs of true religion. Should any errors or abuſes happen to prevail, they are almoſt ſure to prevent a correction of the

one and a reform of the other. As preferment is generally to be expected from the chief magiſtrate, the clergy will be tempted to recommend themſelves to his patronage by endeavouring to defend that ſyſtem of faith, which he profeſſes to countenance and ſupport. However abſurd and unſcriptural the prevailing tenets may be, it is not much to be expected, that thoſe who are high or riſing in the church, and with whom a reform, to be rendered effectual, muſt begin; I repeat, that it is not much to be expected, that they ſhould attempt to expoſe the errors of ſuch tenets. Such conduct might be conſidered as ungrateful in the former, and would probably entirely cloſe the proſpects of the latter. Does it not appear in fact, that thoſe, who are the moſt violent in their oppoſition to a reform and moſt tenacious of eſtabliſhed opinions, generally obtain preferment before ſuch as love and purſue truth, regardleſs of the conſequences, which may follow from a ſteady and firm adherence to its intereſt?

Nor is there better ground for expecting, that a correction of errors and reform of abuſes will be undertaken by the civil magiſtrate. It is the opinion of many,* that the faith of the majority

*This doctrine is held by a writer, whoſe amiable ſpirit of candour and moderation is juſtly deſerving of admiration. In his tract, entitled "Conſiderations on the expediency of reviſing the liturgy and articles of the church of England," he ſays (page 84)

majority ſhould be ſupported, whatever that faith be. Though it ſhould happen, that the prevailing notions of a country in regard to religion are falſe, are contrary to reaſon and ſcripture, yet upon this principle no encouragement ſhould be given for the examination and correction of them. Now that even a majority may be in an error, cannot be doubted by any one, who reflects, that before the publication of the goſpel nearly the whole world were idolators, and that before the reformation the people of this kingdom were Roman Catholics. It does not then appear poſſible, that the intereſts of truth ſhould be properly attended to in any country, when the power of the chief magiſtrate is thus employed to oppoſe its progreſs.

Nor are the ſacrifice of truth in the firſt inſtance, the interdiction of enquiry, and the accommodation of religion to the civil view of the magiſtrate, all the evils which ſpring out of a ſtate-religion. The daily miniſtration of religion, and the enforcing the ſalutary precepts of a pure morality are in conſequence of the magiſtrate's influence too frequently committed to men, who have neither religion nor mor

My opinion is, that the Trinitarian worſhip ſhould be continued in the church at preſent; not on the ground of its being moſt conformable to ſcripture, (for who is to judge of that) but on the ground of its being believed to be ſo by the legiſlature of the kingdom.

morality much at heart. Introduced to their cures without the conſent or voice of thoſe, to whom they are to miniſter, and little if at all dependant upon them for continuance in their office, they abandon its proper and higheſt duties, in order to purſue thoſe intereſts, or indulge in thoſe pleaſures, which are deareſt to them. Thus the mode of introduction invites improper men, the authority which protects them is an encouragement to improper conduct, the form of public religion is preſerved while its eſſence is gone, and it degenerates into a mere ſyſtem of ſtate policy and private gain.

The obſervations, which have now been made, I doubt not will render it obvious to every mind, which is willing to be convinced, that civil eſtabliſhments of religion do not anſwer the end, propoſed by them. On the contrary, it appears, that they have a direct tendency to obſtruct the progreſs of truth and virtue. This has been made manifeſt not only from the hiſtory of Chriſtianity, but alſo from the natural operation of thoſe views and principles, upon which they are founded.

4. Another objection to civil eſtabliſhments of religion is, that they are ſubverſive of civil liberty. We have ſeen, that they are entirely inconſiſtent with the exerciſe of the right of

private judgment. Can it then be expected, that, when the advocates for them pay ſo little regard to this, they ſhould ſcruple to infringe other rights of human nature. We find accordingly, that in thoſe countries, where theſe inſtitutions have prevailed, civil liberty has greatly languiſhed, if it has not become entirely extinct.

The author of the "Free enquiry into the nature and origin of Evil," ſpeaking of their pernicious influence, deſcribes their operation in very forcible language: he obſerves, (page 230) that "every order of men, who are maintained to ſupport the intereſts of religion, will ſacrifice them to their own. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained ſo conſiderable a part of the world to their intereſt, they will erect an independent dominion among themſelves dangerous to the liberties of mankind, and repreſent all thoſe, who oppoſe their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be meritorious in his ſight to perſecute them in this world, and damn them in another. Hence muſt ariſe hierarchies, inquiſitions, and popery; for popery is the conſummation of that tyranny, which every religious ſyſtem in the hands of men is in perpetual purſuit of, and whoſe principles they are all ready to adopt when-

whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its ſucceſs."

That this repreſentation of the conſequences of civil eſtabliſhments of religion is conſiſtent with truth and candour will ſcarcely be queſtioned by thoſe, who have properly attended to their effects in different ages and parts of the world. There are very few, if any, in which Diſſenters from the national faith and worſhip do not labour under conſiderable diſadvantages. In many they are excluded from the enjoyment of various civil honours and emoluments, and in ſome neither property or life is ſecure. The three Jews at Babylon, who refuſed to conform to the eſtabliſhed worſhip, would have ſuffered the moſt dreadful death, if they had not been preſerved by an extraordinary interpoſition of heaven. Socrates on account of his religious opinions was deprived firſt of his liberty, and afterwards of his life. The primitive Chriſtians, throughout the whole Roman empire, were robbed of many of the rights and benefits of civil ſociety, and underwent the moſt grievous ſufferings. In ſome countries they were not only excluded from the houſes of friends, from the baths and markets, but were forbidden to appear in any places whatever. They endured alſo the inſults of the multitude gathered toge-

ther about them in crowds, their ſhouts, and blows, pillaging their goods, throwing of ſtones, and confinement to their dwellings.

That theſe infringements of civil liberty and of the common rights of human nature were the conſequences of civil eſtabliſhments of religion may be inferred from conſidering, that when chriſtianity was afterwards ſupported by the ſtate, the ſame evils were ſuffered by the profeſſors of it, whoſe opinions were different from thoſe maintained by civil government. No one could depart from the national faith and worſhip without endangering his liberty, eaſe, property, and life. When, at a later period, the authority of the Pope roſe to its greateſt height, princes themſelves were threatened with the loſs of their dominions, and the pains of eternal torments, if they did not deſtroy all thoſe, who diſapproved the conſtitution of the Romiſh church. We have alſo ſeen, that in thoſe countries, where the Mahometan religion is eſtabliſhed, neither Jews or Chriſtians enjoy much of the bleſſings of civil liberty; and I add, that even in Britain Diſſenters are deprived of ſeveral rights, to which as members of civil ſociety they have an undoubted and juſt claim. By the operation of the Corporation and Teſt acts they are excluded from all civil and military offices, and de-

debarred from the enjoyment of the honours and emoluments, with which the execution of them would be attended.

The force of the objections, which have now been urged againſt civil eſtabliſhments of religion, being admitted, perhaps it will be enquired, in what way proviſion is to be made for the ſupport of the miniſters of religion, if the ſtate is not allowed to interpoſe its authority for this purpoſe. I anſwer, by voluntary contribution. It has been ſaid, that to this ſcheme there exiſts this inſurmountable objection, that few would ultimately contribute any thing at all, and that it would be impoſſible to engage men of worth and abilities in ſo precarious and humiliating a profeſſion. That this notion is miſtaken and groundleſs evidently appears from the conſideration, that, during the ſpace of nearly three hundred years immediately after the publication of the goſpel, the preachers of it depended entirely upon voluntary contribution; and that during this period chriſtianity flouriſhed more than at any time, ſince civil government has employed its power for its protection and ſupport. The wiſdom and excellence of our holy religion will always procure it advocates, and it will never ſtand in need of a legal tax and forced contributions to provide for the decent maintenance of its well-meaning

meaning and uſeful miniſters. Its divine au-
thor never encouraged his followers to expect
the good things of this life as the chief rewards
of their faithful labours. He exhorted them
to ſeek the kingdom of God and his righteouſ-
neſs, and aſſured them, that other conveniences
would be added unto them. He knew well,
that mankind are more prone to labour for the
meat which periſheth, than for that meat
which endureth unto everlaſting life, and that
this diſpoſition would very much interfere with
the ſucceſs of his goſpel. Accordingly we ſee
that, when the miniſters of religion are raiſed
to a ſtate of eaſe and independence, they fre-
quently become careleſs and negligent of their
duty. When great worldly emoluments are
to be derived from engaging in the ſervice of
the church, many will be induced to enter into
it rather with a view of procuring a handſome
ſubſiſtence than from a deſire of advancing the
honour of Chriſt, and the intereſts of his re-
ligion. Whereas, when miniſters depend upon
voluntary contribution, they know, that learn-
ing, abilities, diligence, and merit alone will
recommend them to the beſt ſituations. They
will therefore apply with earneſtneſs to the ac-
quiſition of every neceſſary qualification, and
by endeavouring to gain the affection of their
hearers, ſecure to themſelves a good proſpect

of much comfort and uſefulneſs. I will not deny, that ſome, who rely upon voluntary contribution ſuffer real inconveniences (and what profeſſion or employment is exempt from them.) But theſe are generally occaſioned by indiſcretion or bad conduct. A miniſter with common learning and abilities, if he be diligent, prudent, and good tempered, has a good ſecurity in the hearts and conſciences of mankind for a decent proviſion: And if he be wanting in theſe qualities, he is not deſerving of encouragement and ſupport, though he may ſometimes meet with them from a religious eſtabliſhment. If we caſt our eye amongſt the Diſſenting miniſters in this kingdom, we ſhall find many diſtinguiſhed by their worth, abilities, and learning, who are far from thinking their profeſſion and ſituation precarious and humiliating, who enjoy many worldly advantages, which Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles never poſſeſſed, and whoſe character in every point of view is equally reſpectable with that of the beſt of the clergy, who belong to the eſtabliſhed church.

The ſentiments reſpecting civil eſtabliſhments of religion, which have been advanced in the foregoing enquiry, are maintained in nearly their full extent by ſome of the American ſtates. The province of Pennſylvania in its

its declaration of rights aſſerts, " that all men have a natural and unalienable right to worſhip Almighty God, according to the dictates of their own conſciences and underſtanding; that no man ought, or of right can be compelled to attend any religious worſhip, or erect or ſupport any place of worſhip, or maintain any miniſtry, contrary to or againſt his own free will and conſent; nor can any man, who acknowledges the being of a God, be juſtly deprived or abridged of any civil right as a citizen, on account of his religious ſentiments, or peculiar mode of worſhip; and that no authority can, or ought to be veſted in, or aſſumed by, any power whatever, that ſhall in any caſe interfere with or in any manner controul the right of conſcience, in the free exerciſe of religious worſhip."

The conſtitution of New-York, " to guard againſt that ſpiritual oppreſſion and intolerance wherewith the bigotry and ambition of weak and wicked prieſts and princes have ſcourged mankind," ordains, determines, and declares " that the free exerciſe and enjoyment of religious profeſſion and worſhip, without diſcrimination or preference, ſhall for ever hereafter be allowed within the ſaid ſtate to all mankind: Provided, that the liberty of conſcience hereby granted ſhall not be ſo conſtrued, as to excuſe a

acts of licentiouſneſs, or juſtify practices inconſiſtent with the peace or ſafety of the ſtate".

The declaration of Maryland is not quite ſo liberal, as the profeſſors of the chriſtian religion alone are entitled to protection in their religious liberty. It aſſerts, that "no perſon ought to be compelled to frequent or maintain, or contribute (unleſs on contract) to maintain any particular place of worſhip, or any particular miniſtry. Yet the legiſlature may, in their diſcretion, lay a general and equal tax for the ſupport of the chriſtian religion, leaving to each individual the power of appointing the payment of the money, collected from him, over to the ſupport of any particular place of worſhip or miniſter."

The ſtates of North and South Carolina and Georgia maintain, that all men have a natural and unalienable right to worſhip God according to the dictates of their own conſcience. Yet they require a profeſſion of the Proteſtant religion as a qualification for holding any office, or place of truſt or profit in the civil department of the ſtate.

New Hampſhire, Rhode-Iſland, and Connecticut aſſert with equal clearneſs, the rights of conſcience, and the cauſe of religious freedom. No particular ſect can claim a pre-emi-

nence. But though they do not admit of a religious eſtabliſhment, the legiſlature is empowered to authorize the ſeveral towns, pariſhes, bodies politic or religious ſocieties, to make ſuitable proviſion at their own expence, for the ſupport and maintenance of public Proteſtant teachers of piety, religion and morality, in all caſes where ſuch proviſion ſhall not be made voluntarily. But they are to have, at all times, the excluſive right of chooſing their own public teachers, and of contracting with them for their ſupport and maintenance.

The ſtate of New Jerſey declares, that there ſhall be no eſtabliſhment of any one religious ſect in preference to another; and that no Proteſtant inhabitant ſhall be denied the enjoyment of any civil right, merely on account of his religious principles.

It appears from this view of the conſtitution of the American ſtates, that ſome of them do not object to the interference of civil government for the ſupport of religion, though they diſapprove the eſtabliſhment of any one particular ſect in preference to another. Thoſe of Maryland, New Hampſhire, Rhode-Iſland, and Connecticut empower the legiſlature to lay an equal and general tax for the maintenance of the chriſtian miniſtry. But this I cannot help conſidering as an unjuſtifiable exertion

ertion of the power of the ſtate. It deprives the friends of religion of the merit and pleaſure of contributing to its ſupport; an evil, which is by no means counterballanced by the conſideration, that by this meaſure ſome are compelled to promote and maintain the intereſts of piety and virtue, who would not otherwiſe do it. The aſſembly of Virginia in the year 1786 very ſtrongly expreſſed their diſapprobation of the method of providing by compulſion for the ſupport of religion. They obſerve, that "even the forcing a man to maintain this or that teacher of his own religious perſuaſion is depriving him of the comfortable liberty of giving his contributions to the particular paſtor, whoſe morals, he would make his pattern, and whoſe powers he feels moſt perſuaſive to righteouſneſs; and is withdrawing from the miniſtry thoſe temporal rewards, which proceeding from an approbation of their perſonal conduct are an additional incitement to earneſt and unremitted labours for the inſtruction of mankind."

If the foregoing reaſoning be juſt and concluſive, it undeniably proves, that the pleas generally urged in ſupport and defence of civil eſtabliſhments of Chriſtianity are entirely groundleſs. Had Mr. Soame Jenyns been properly acquainted with its ſtate during the

three firſt centuries, he would ſcarcely have obſerved, that " our Lord inſtituted a church, becauſe without ſome inſtitution of this kind, his religion muſt have been quickly baniſhed from the world and known no where, but in the cloſets of a few philoſophers, and therefore had little influence on the conduct of mankind, but that he choſe rather to truſt the form and regulation of it to the nature of man, and the nature of government, than to any poſitive command." * If this elegant and plauſible writer had attended with impartiality to the treatment, which the profeſſors of the goſpel met with at this early period, he would have known, that inſtead of being ſupported by the governments of this world, their whole power was exerted to ſuppreſs it; but that notwithſtanding their oppoſition it flouriſhed and prevailed in a greater degree than it has done ſince the ſtate has taken it under its protection. He might have alſo reaſonably concluded, that it was left unſupported by human power becauſe God deſigned it ſhould never be employed for the propagation and defence of ſo excellent an inſtitution.

I cannot finiſh theſe obſervations without taking notice of the difficulty, which ſome men of free and rational enquiry, belonging to

* " Obſervations on different paſſages of the New teſtament particularly Matthew xvi. 18."

to the church of England, experience in reconciling civil eſtabliſhments of religion with the primitive ſtate of Chriſtianity. The archdeacon of Carliſle in particular has laboured very much for this purpoſe. He is obliged to ſuppoſe, that " no preciſe conſtitution of church government could be formed, which would ſuit with Chriſtianity in its primitive ſtate, and with that, which it was to aſſume, when it ſhould be advanced into a national religion; and that a particular deſignation of office or authority might have ſo interfered with the arrangements of civil policy, as to have formed in ſome countries a conſiderable obſtacle to the progreſs and reception of the religion itſelf." Whereas, I hope it appears highly probable, if not abſolutely certain from the reflections, which have been made in the preceding pages, that the reaſon, why Jeſus Chriſt did not give authority to the ſtate or civil magiſtrate to interpoſe for the protection and ſupport of his religion, was, that he clearly foreſaw the evil conſequences, which would follow from ſuch a meaſure, and which I have ſhewn really to have taken place, wherever eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhments have prevailed. To prove that this opinion is not well founded, the futility of ſuch inſtitutions ſhould be plainly pointed out. To maintain, that the Chriſtian religion

religion cannot exiſt without ſupport from civil government, appears to me a mere groundleſs aſſertion. I have repeatedly remarked, that during ſeveral centuries after its publication it flouriſhed without any ſuch connection and aſſiſtance; and the utter inutility of ſuch an union between church and ſtate is abundantly proved from obſerving, that no bad effects have flowed from a diſſolution of it in ſeveral of the American provinces. If power, wealth, and ſplendor were neceſſary for the propagation and maintenance of the Chriſtian religion, it is ſcarcely credible, that Almighty God would have ſuffered its author to have been born, lived and died in ſo indigent and ignominious a condition. It ſeems more reaſonable to believe, that he meant it ſhould depend for ſucceſs upon its own intrinſic excellence and the bleſſing of heaven.

From the foregoing enquiry it appears, that civil eſtabliſhments of religion have a very early origin and general prevalence. This fact ſuggeſts to us the propriety of treating with candour and moderation all thoſe, who entertain a ſtrong partiality for ſuch inſtitutions. On the other hand, it ſhould however be conſidered, that every opinion or practice, which is ancient and common, is not for that reaſon alone

alone right, ſupported by a divine authority, or conducive to the beſt intereſts of man. This obſervation is certainly very applicable to civil eſtabliſhments of chriſtianity in particular. They are not recommended in any part of the New teſtament, and ſeveral declarations of Jeſus Chriſt and his apoſtles have been produced, by which they are greatly diſcountenanced, if not abſolutely forbidden. I have attempted alſo to ſhew, that they cannot be approved or defended even on the ground of expediency. For they are deſtructive of the right of private judgment, and religious liberty, are ſupported by injuſtice, obſtruct the progreſs of truth and virtue, and are ſubverſive of civil liberty and the common rights of mankind.

The doctrine, which has been advanced in the foregoing pages, I do not expect will meet with general approbation; and though it be the reſult of my own enquiry and conviction, yet I may be miſtaken. When the mind is earneſtly engaged in the purſuit of truth, it does not eaſily perceive the fallacy of its own reaſoning. Perhaps ſome of the arguments, which have now been brought forward, may not poſſeſs ſo much force in the eſtimation of others, as to myſelf they appear to carry. Should this be the caſe, I ſhall be happy, if

any

any one will be at the trouble of rectifying the miſtakes, into which I have fallen; for the diſcovery of truth is to me an object of much greater importance, than the eſtabliſhment of any opinion, which I have adopted.

I have endeavoured as much as poſſible to avoid the appearance of an attack upon the civil eſtabliſhment of religion, which prevails in this kingdom. I have wiſhed to examine the principles and tendency of theſe inſtitutions in general, rather than of any individual one in particular. I have, however, found it neceſſary for the illuſtration of ſome points, to take a view of the ſtate of religion in our own country. Yet if I had gone further, I ſhould have been juſtified by the example of many wiſe and good men in the church of England. They have not heſitated to declare their opinion, that its conſtitution is capable of improvement.

But this is a topic, which I do not enter upon; becauſe, if the doctrine, which has been advanced, be properly ſupported, it undermines and deſtroys the foundation, upon which ſtands the eccleſiaſtical eſtabliſhment of our own, and every other country.